CURRENT ISSUES

LIS in City Law Firms: the City Legal Information Group Professional Skills Survey 2013

Abstract: CLIG (City Legal information Group) Committee members Dunstan Speight and Lisa Sabbage report on the findings of the CLIG Professional Skills survey, winter 2013*. Information professional roles have developed in different directions in law firms in recent years and this survey sought to map the range of tasks being carried out by information professionals. It also documented the range of skills within the profession, including skills and experience which law firms might be able to exploit further. The hope is that, by showing the diversity of tasks and skills to be found in LIS departments across the City, the survey might offer individuals ideas and strategies for developing their roles within their own firms.

Keywords: legal information professionals; survey

*A version of this report was made available to CLIG members in July 2014 and the Editor of LIM is grateful to the CLIG Committee for permission to make this available in LIM.

BACKGROUND

At the end of 2013, the City Legal Information Group Committee conducted a survey of its members to attempt to put together an accurate picture of the nature of law library work in City firms. We were keen to test a number of impressions which we had gained from discussions at networking events. We wanted a way of documenting how the law library profession is changing. We were also particularly interested in the fact that, although there are a great many similarities in law library roles throughout the City, there are some major differences and these might point our members towards ways of extending their roles and influence in the firm. Linked to this, we wanted to document the key skills needed for law library work in today's firms.

Finally, the survey would help the Committee ensure that CLIG seminars are relevant to our members. We also wanted to provide some data against which our members could benchmark their own skills and experience. This could benefit junior members of the profession analysing the experience they need to gain promotion.

CARRYING OUT THE SURVEY

The Committee discussed the survey and the questions we wished to ask during the autumn of 2013 and the survey was compiled on Survey Monkey, with law firm members being invited to participate in November 2013.

138 members completed the survey, which was an impressive result when one recalls that our 187 members include publishers and suppliers, as well as information professionals.

This was the first time that CLIG has carried out a survey of its members (or at least the first time in the memory of the current Committee). As such, we were novices in surveying techniques. In retrospect, there are questions we would have asked differently, some we would not have asked at all and other questions we wished we had asked.

In particular, given that we were trying to map trends, were we compiling the survey today, we would have tried to do more to elicit changes over the past few years.

On balance, however, the Committee was gratified by the level of response that was received. The survey, despite its imperfections, has produced some very interesting data – some confirming our impressions, others being more of a surprise. We also thought we should capitalise on our experience of carrying out the 2013 survey by conducting a follow-up exercise (probably at the end of 2015) to ask more targeted questions – and to provide some comparative trend data.

Our report below focusses on the findings of the 2013 survey which we found of interest. We hope this will generate ideas and discussion. If you have comments on the report, or ideas for issues you think we should explore, then please do forward your ideas to the Committee via the Contact Us page on the CLIG website.
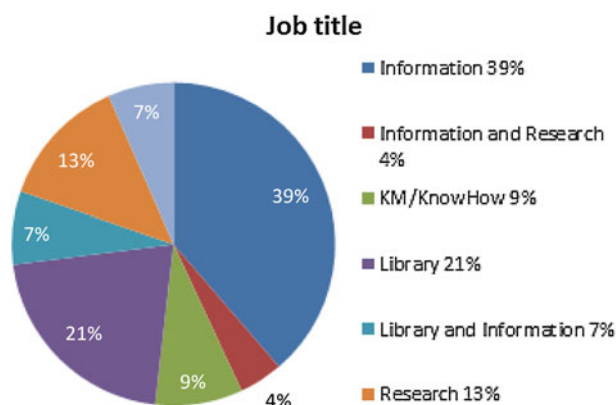
1) CURRENT JOB TITLES: What is your job title? What is the title of your department?

What's in a name? Job and departmental titles are signifiers both of the functions we perform and the expectations of our clients. In other words, what we call ourselves reflects how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen.

We hoped that by asking respondents for the title of their job and that of their department, we might spot clues as to how library and information professionals are identifying themselves to the firms they serve. We also wondered whether it might flag any shifting of functions and roles within the profession.
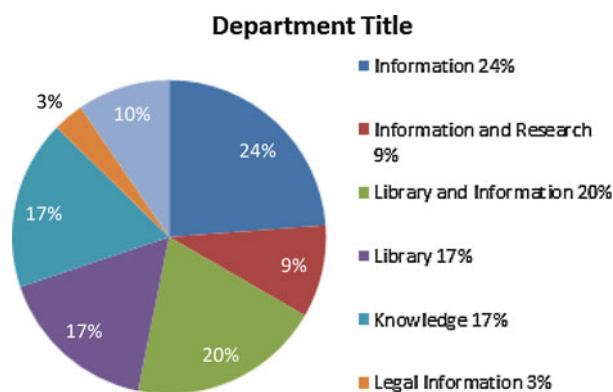
More than 99% of those surveyed answered this question and their responses made for interesting reading, with answers ranging from "librarian" and "information officer" to "vendor relations manager" and "CSR manager". After interrogating each response for common themes or functions, we were able to arrive at seven categories in which each individual response was then classified.

As you will see from the chart provided, "information" was the most common function stressed in job titles, followed by "library". "Research" was also acknowledged in job titles (e.g. "research officer", "senior researcher"), and, to a lesser degree, "knowledge management" and "know how". The miscellaneous category included descriptors like "corporate social responsibility", "business", "online", "intranet" and "vendor relations" – of which there were too few to register statistically on their own.

Job title

- Information 39%
- Information and Research 4%
- KM/KnowHow 9%
- Library 21%
- Library and Information 7%
- Research 13%

As for departmental titles (see chart below), the responses reflected the same general alignment with either library or information. However, for now at least, information appears to be outpacing the former: 57 percent of departments stressed the information component of the service in their title, while 37 percent stressed library in their title.

However, it was the bottom half of the draw that yielded perhaps the most interesting results,: 17 percent of departments emphasised knowledge in their titles (e.g. "Knowledge Management", "Knowledge and Learning"), while the other new-ish kid on the block was "Legal Information". The Miscellaneous category took in responses like "Central Services", "Business Support", "Marketing" and "*I am the department*"!

Department Title

- Information 24%
- Information and Research 9%
- Library and Information 20%
- Library 17%
- Knowledge 17%
- Legal Information 3%

This drift away from "library" toward "information" and "knowledge" undoubtedly reflects the well documented imperative to rebrand our services for the 21st century in which information (and its conversion into knowledge) is viewed as a commodity. Indeed, it reflects the notion that our service sits within a larger environment of intellectual capital which includes internal know how, books, current awareness, electronic resources etc., and that we help to manage and nurture that environment for the firm. Arguably, "legal information" takes this trend a little further, giving us an even firmer foothold within the wider knowledge profession which includes lawyers, PSLs and paralegals.

Does it really matter what we are called? Is "library" 21st century enough? Does "officer" de-professionalise us? Given that research is cited by most professionals as the dominant element of their role does it make sense to include this in their job title?
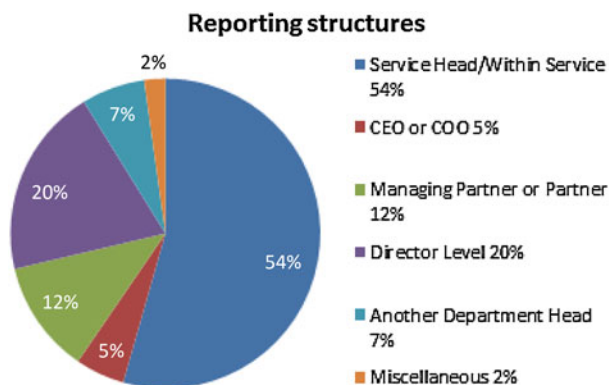
If nothing else, the divergence of nomenclature speaks of tensions within a profession trying to demonstrate its relevance and value to law firms. Indeed, section 3 of this article highlights departments that have changed their names in the past three years as they wrestle with that very imperative.

2) DEPARTMENT REPORTING STRUCTURES: What is the job title of the person to whom you report?

Reporting hierarchies can shed light on how the library and information service is perceived within the wider firm. For instance, reporting to the managing partner or CEO – in large firms at least – suggests an LIS team that has a higher profile than if it reports to the IT manager.

Ignoring the vast majority of survey respondents who report to service heads (e.g. to "information managers" or "knowledge and information managers"), it is encouraging to note that 12 percent of respondents report to someone at partner level, and that 5 percent report to the firm's chief executive or chief operating officer. 7 percent report to another department head (e.g. "head of IT", "senior IT manager", "PR & communications manager", and "business information manager"). This

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hints at some institutional uncertainty regarding the function of LIS and its integration within the organisation.

Reporting structures

- Service Head/Within Service 54%
- CEO or COO 5%
- Managing Partner or Partner 12%
- Director Level 20%
- Another Department Head 7%
- Miscellaneous 2%

3) CHANGES OF JOB TITLE OR DEPARTMENT TITLE: Has your job title, or that of your department changed in the last 3 years?

Of the 103 respondents to this question, 10 reported changes to departmental names in the past three years; 14 reported changes to job titles; and 7 reported both (Total: 31). New titles appear to have been chosen to better reflect the research, information and knowledge management functions of what had previously been identified as Library Services or Librarians.

It is notable that several respondents reported they are in the process of reviewing their departmental branding. There is a sense that this is an ongoing project as the profession attempts to redefine itself. It is also interesting to see some firms which had devised new job titles such as Information Procurement Specialist reverting to more traditional titles such as Information Officer.

4) SIGNIFICANT TASKS WITHIN INFORMATION ROLES: Please state which functions form part of your role?

This was one of the key questions of the survey. In answering this, respondents were presented with a list of 18 tasks and asked to estimate what percentage of an average week was spent on each task.

When analysing the results for this question, we divided the responses by job role – making the basic distinction between managers and researchers. In the table below we counted the number of times where people reported spending more than 10% of their average week on a task. On this basis, the top five activities for managers are:

- Legal research
- Budget management
- Intranet management

- Contract negotiation
- Staff management

The top five activities for researchers meanwhile are:

- Legal research
- Legal current awareness
- Basic research on clients and other companies
- Detailed company research / analysis
- Acquisitions / Cataloguing (joint 5th)

The full results are shown on the next page.

Points of interest

It is scarcely surprising that the top four tasks for researchers should all be research-based, but it is perhaps surprising that a large number of managers still report legal and business research as being a major part of their role. In fact 14% of manager respondents reported that they spend more than 30% of their time carrying out legal research. This was unexpected, but is possibly a reflection of information departments with few staff where the managers have to juggle management, research and administrative tasks.

One third of researchers are now expected to carry out significant amounts of detailed company research and analysis. In retrospect, we should probably have been clearer in our definitions of basic and detailed company research. Nonetheless, this figure does support anecdotal evidence that research librarians are increasingly involved with business development research. This statistic could potentially prove useful to researchers in other firms wanting to increase their role in this area.

Many firms are still investing a lot of staff time in current awareness – especially legal current awareness. This is probably a reflection of the fact that, although there are a number of very good commercial legal current awareness services, these may not wholly meet the needs of large law firms. Many lawyers need to be aware of new developments as soon as possible so that they can update clients, post to their firms' blogs, etc. An in-house information service can provide this more easily than commercial services which tend to report on the previous day's developments. In addition, some practice areas will have a need for very targeted current awareness updates, not currently served by commercial providers.

It is scarcely surprising that budget management is a core task for managers, but it was interesting to see that 10% of researchers have budget responsibility as a major part of their role. A very small proportion of researchers also have exposure to contract negotiation in their current jobs. This will clearly put them in a strong position when going for promotion to management roles. How do others get this experience? For the CLIG Committee, this may be a subject for future seminars.

Tasks forming 10%+ of role				
Task	**Researchers (88 respondents)**		**Managers (49 respondents)**	
	No. of respondents	**as %age**	**No. of respondents**	**as %age**
Legal Research	55	63	21	43
Legal current awareness	33	38	10	20
Basic research on clients and other companies	30	34	14	29
Detailed company research/analysis	29	33	14	29
Other tasks	24	27	15	31
Acquisitions/invoice processing	21	24	12	24
Cataloguing	21	24	1	2
Collection management	18	20	5	10
Business current awareness	16	18	11	22
KnowHow classification	11	13	2	4
Market research	9	10	3	6
Budget management	9	10	18	37
Intranet management	8	9	18	37
Library promotion	6	7	11	22
Contract negotiation	5	6	16	33
Staff management	5	6	16	33
Document automation	4	5	2	4
Enterprise search management	2	2	2	4

In retrospect, we made a major omission in the survey, by treating training as a skill (in sections 7 and 8), and failing to specify it as a key task. We imagine that many respondents will have included this as part of "Library promotion" or "Other tasks". This is clearly something to include in future surveys, as this offers information professionals an opportunity to showcase their skills and publicise the library service indirectly.

Intranet management is cited as major role by 37% of managers. It would be interesting to know if this is something which is more likely to be part of a manager's role at a smaller law firm. Intranet management might offer an excellent opportunity for librarians to expand their remit in firms where this is currently managed by others. One could make a compelling case for librarians being particularly well-placed to manage this.

5) LIBRARIANS AND NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES: Which tasks do you carry out in your job which are not traditionally associated with a Library role?

This question follows on from, and partly overlaps with, question four. Only 80 of the 153 survey respondents answered this question.

A number of respondents took issue with our decision to categorise traditional and non-traditional roles. This is a fair point, although we suspect 'librarian' is not the first word most lawyers would associate with the following tasks. Librarians can clearly bring their distinct skills to each of these tasks and it is encouraging that some firms have recognised this already. For other information professionals, the following list may at least offer potential areas for extending their role.

	Response %age	Number of responses
Intranet	**66%**	**53**
Business analysis	35%	28
Compliance/KYC	34%	27
Co-ordinating training (beyond Library training)	16%	13
Event management	6%	5
Other (please specify)	9%	7

The list of other tasks identified by respondents included.

- Managing firm's professional membership subscriptions (other than Law Society membership)
- At least half my role is compliance/regulatory (but not AML) – it's SRA/partnership regulation
- Currently acting in a Business Analyst role on a project to do with document automation
- Hot-desking to raise personal profile as well publicise the LIS. Regularly meeting stakeholders to bring awareness about the services.
- Document Automation Web Design
- Project management
- Data management, workflow

6) LIBRARIANS AND INTERNATIONAL OFFICES: Does your organisation have international offices? If so, what support does your department offer to international offices?

Of the 114 survey respondents who answered this question, 87 reported working for firms with international offices. Of these, 80 reported carrying out research for at least some of these offices. In addition, respondents were asked about other library services provided to overseas offices. These are as follows:

Services to Overseas Offices

Compliance	1
Intranet Support	4
Knowhow	5
Current Awareness	11
Training	16
Cataloguing & Resource Admin	25
Acquisitions & Contracts	54

The last few years have seen an increasing number of cross-border law firm mergers and existing firms opening offices in other jurisdictions. For information professionals in such firms, supporting information provision and research for other offices is a way of aligning themselves to a key element of their firm's strategy. Information professionals should be alert to opportunities to increase their international involvement and publicise this.

7) KEY PROFESSIONAL SKILLS: Thinking about the skills you use in your job, what do you consider are the 5 most relevant skills you possess?

If, as many argue, the role of the law librarian is evolving, what skills do we need to do our jobs well, and – as suggested in section 7 – are there any new skills sets we need to be developing? We asked respondents to name the five skills they believe are most relevant in their work. There were 497 individual suggestions which we grouped into 18 categories (see table below). For instance, "flexibility" and "strategic thinking" were classified as "organisational skills"; while "vendor relationship management" was put into "budget financial management".

	Skill	Response %age	Number of responses
1	**Legal Research**	14%	72
2	**Budget/Financial management – including negotiation**	13%	67
3	**Business/Financial research or analysis (including company and market research)**	11%	54
4	**Communication – including influencing, marketing, presenting, writing and listening**	7%	34
5	**Organisational skills**	6%	31
6	**General research skills**	6%	28
7	**People/Staff management and interpersonal skills**	5%	25
8	**Training**	5%	25
9	**Collection management and development**	5%	24

10	Cataloguing and Classification	5%	24
11	IT and technical skills (e.g. HTML, Excel etc.)	4%	18
12	Content and data management – including indexing, taxonomies, and document automation.	3%	13
13	Current awareness	2%	12
14	Intranet design and development	2%	11
15	Specialist or in depth sector knowledge	2%	10
16	Commercial awareness – including awareness of how law firms work, customer service	2%	10
17	Information management or KM	2%	9
18	Project management	2%	8

8) TRANSFERABLE SKILLS: What skills do you possess as a librarian which could support your organisation in other areas?

	Response %age	Number of responses
Evaluating research sources and services	**89%**	**93**
Training/presentation skills	70%	73
IT skills	69%	72
Evaluating IT products and services	65%	68
Editing/writing	62%	65
Financial management	51%	53
Analysing market/ company data	50%	52
Project management	49%	51
People management	49%	51
Procurement/contract negotiation	48%	50
Marketing	30%	31
Event management	15%	16

Although there were no major surprises, it is perhaps notable that business/financial research and analysis ranks so highly. It suggests that LIS teams are increasingly involved in supporting business development functions, not just providing "traditional" fee-earner support (such as legal research and collection management). As such, one could perhaps argue that LIS teams are now actively involved in winning new business for their firms – although whether partners would see it quite that way is another matter. It also suggests scope for LIS teams to work more closely with Business Development/Marketing departments – if they don't already – or even to align themselves more formally with BD.

Ranked in fourth place, the high value attached to communication skills no doubt reflects the growing awareness of the need to market and promote LIS teams to the firm. On an individual level, it may indicate the need for legal information professionals to develop influencing and leadership skills. In this context, it may not be a coincidence that people/management skills also ranked quite highly.

The breakdown of figures also supports the observation of burgeoning "specialist" niches within LIS teams – most notably intranet design and development; training; and content and data management.

The responses to this question were particularly interesting as they represent potential for information professionals to develop their role and for law firms to benefit further from resources they already have in-house.

The great majority of respondents identified "evaluating research sources and services" as a key transferable skill. This is hardly surprising, as this is something which most information professionals do frequently. Over the years, many of us have developed frameworks to carry out such evaluations in a structured way. The fact that library budgets have been under pressure for many years and a healthy cynicism amongst many in the profession also produce a rigour in evaluating new sources and services. Anecdotal evidence suggests that other departments in at least some firms could benefit from involving information professionals in at least some projects.

Other skills identified are less universal, but still identified by a significant proportion of the profession. IT skills and project management are both very general terms and the extent to which information professionals could utilise their knowledge and experience outside their current role will differ markedly between individuals. Procurement and contract negotiation by contrast

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are more readily transferable to a wider range of scenarios. Once again, years of tough budgets have helped many library managers sharpen their negotiating skills.

It is noticeable that many of the transferable skills which respondents identified are management skills. This raises a number of issues – not least the importance for professional groups such as CLIG and BIALL to provide training courses in these areas, particularly for professionals looking to move into management.

The fact that the role of information professionals is expanding in some law firms, does not, of course, mean that this will be an option for everyone in the profession, but knowledge of what colleagues do at competitor firms can help raise awareness of potential opportunities to take on new responsibilities. In addition, the fact that other firms have seen the value of further exploiting the knowledge and experience of information professionals can have a certain precedent value when making the case to managers.

It is up to the profession to be alert to such opportunities, but also to be proactive in seeking these out and ensuring that colleagues in the firm know that they have the relevant skills.

There are ways in which you can lay the groundwork for this. For instance, librarians who feel that financial management and contract negotiation is a key strength that could be employed elsewhere should ensure that they are able to demonstrate these skills in the context of their current responsibilities. It is worth documenting any savings you can achieve on budgets (either through internal or external negotiations) and recording the process of budget negotiations, so you can readily cite striking examples of success in these. It is important that such successes are communicated to senior management. Many senior law firm figures have little idea of what individual resources cost or of the high year-on-year increases which publishers try to achieve. A few choice examples of negotiating successes with some high value subscriptions are certainly worth publicising.

CONCLUSION

If the CLIG Committee were compiling this survey today, we would certainly ask some different questions and try to get more comparative data to show how the profession has changed. This is something we can develop in future surveys. Nonetheless, we feel that the current survey has produced valuable data.

The results indicate a great many common experiences across law firm information centres – the need to brand the service to tackle users' perceptions of "the library", the move to carrying out company research and involvement in business development and the great potential for further exploiting professional skills and expertise.

At the same time, the results demonstrate the way in which information jobs develop within law firms so that bespoke posts are created which seek to address specific business needs and take advantage of individuals' skillsets. This is, we suggest, good news for the profession, as it shows that there are precedents for utilising these transferable skills.

We also feel that the exercise of documenting skills and job roles across the profession will be useful. For junior staff, we hope that this should assist them in identifying future training and professional development needs. For more experienced professionals, we hope that this review has gone some way to documenting an impressive range of skills and experience which can too often be taken for granted in the daily routine. It remains incumbent on the whole profession to ensure that we are not the only ones who know this!

Biographies

Dunstan Speight is the Library Manager at city law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP. He is Chair of the LIM Editorial Board and Treasurer of the City Legal Information Group.

Lisa Sabbage is a Research and Training Officer at K&WM SJ Berwin and Membership Secretary of the City Legal Information Group.